

How do Public Library Boards Work?: An Exploratory Study

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ABSTRACT

A public library board is a governing body of a public library, which has wide-ranging obligations such as developing a library mission or plan, managing a library director, securing funding, evaluating library services, and connecting a library with its community. Despite the fundamental governing roles given to public library boards in the U.S., there is little empirical research on how public library boards work. In this preliminary study, I explore the interactions in public library board meetings and the relationships that public library boards maintain within and outside of their library. Considering the exploratory nature of this study, I conducted observation in a series of online public library board meetings without setting a specific focus of the observation. Then, I began the analysis of the fieldnotes with open coding. Preliminary findings from the open coding highlight the tasks given to the board members, the topics discussed in the meetings, and the interaction between library staff and board members. The next steps include an analysis based on different theoretical lenses such as resource dependence theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) and/or critical race theory (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Further, I plan to interview the board members and proceed with observation and interview with other public library boards. This study will help to initiate a discussion of public library boards among library researchers and understand public library boards and governance of public library better.

Crenshaw, K., Gotanda, N., Peller, G., & Thomas, K. (1995). *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement*. New Press.

Pfeffer, J., & Salancik, G. R. (1978). *The external control of organizations: A resource dependence perspective*. Harper & Row.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

public libraries; community and civic organizations; social justice

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

library board; library governance; public libraries; library management